Princess Tree
Empress Tree

Paulownia tomentosa (Thunb.)

NATIVE RANGE: China

DESCRIPTION: Princess tree, also known as royal paulownia or empress tree, is a small to medium sized tree in the figwort family (Scrophulariaceae) reaching to a height of 30-60 feet. The bark is rough, gray-brown, and interlaced with shiny, smooth areas. Stems are olive-brown to dark brown, hairy and markedly flattened at the nodes (where stems and branches meet). Leaves, arranged in pairs along the stem, are large, broadly oval to heart-shaped, or sometimes shallowly three-lobed, and noticeably hairy on the lower leaf surfaces. Conspicuous upright clusters of showy, pale violet, fragrant flowers open in the spring. The fruit is a dry brown capsule with four compartments that may contain several thousand tiny winged seeds

ECOLOGICAL THREAT: Princess tree is an aggressive ornamental tree that grows rapidly in disturbed natural areas, including forests, stream banks, and steep rocky slopes.

DISTRIBUTION IN THE UNITED STATES: Princess tree is found in 25 states in the eastern U.S., from Maine to Texas.

HABITAT IN THE UNITED STATES: Princess tree can be found along roadsides, stream banks, and forest edges. It tolerates infertile and acid soils and drought conditions. It easily adapts to disturbed habitats, including previously burned areas, forests defoliated by pests (such as the gypsy moth) and landslides and can colonize rocky cliffs and scoured riparian zones where it may compete with rare plants in these marginal habitats. Its ability to sprout prolifically from adventitious buds on stems and roots allows it to survive fire, cutting, and even bulldozing in construction areas.

CURRENT MANAGEMENT APPROACHES: Mechanical and chemical controls can be used. Hand pulling may be effective for young seedlings. Trees can be cut at ground level with power or manual saws. Because Princess tree spreads by suckering, resprouts are common after cutting. Cutting should be considered an initial control measure that will require either repeated cutting of resprouts or an herbicidal treatment. Princess tree seedlings and small trees can be controlled by applying a 2% solution of glyphosate (e.g., Roundup) or triclopyr (e.g., Garlon) and water plus a 0.5% non-ionic surfactant to thoroughly wet all leaves. Girdling is effective on large trees where the use of herbicides is impractical. Using a hatchet, make a cut through the bark encircling the base of the tree, approximately six inches above the ground. Be sure that the cut goes well below the bark. This method will kill the top of the tree but resprouts are common and may require a follow-up treatment with a foliar herbicide. The cut stump method, that is applying herbicide to freshly cut stumps, should be considered for individual trees or when desirable plants are nearby that might be impacted by foliar applications.

Reference: Plants National Database www.nps.gov